511 Deployment Launch Conference Prospectus

Summary:

The Sponsoring Organizations of the 511 Deployment Coalition (AASHTO, APTA, ITS America and U.S. DOT) propose to conduct a major event, open to all, to bring together 511 policy-makers and implementers to build upon the progress made to date by the Coalition in setting national policy and early adopters in demonstrating early successes.

When: February or March 2002

Where: Location TBD, likely to be in attractive warm-weather climate

Background:

Assuming success at the Chicago retreat, "launch model" version of 511 Guidelines will be available to implementers. Also, a handful of additional 511 implementations are expected to join the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky areas in introducing operational 511 systems. Also, several private firms have been developing applications and methods to assist public agencies in creating or operating 511 systems. ***The sponsoring organizations – and the Working Group – feel that the time is right to bring together all parties together to symbolically and substantively transition into the deployment phase for 511.***

Goals:

The principal goal is to offer state and local 511 implementers an opportunity to increase their knowledge base to support the acceleration of 511 service establishment and increase the resulting quality of the systems.

There are several supporting goals as well, including:

- Communicating the Coalition's Content and Consistency Guidelines to implementers to maximize the chances for adoption and use of the guidelines.
- Visibly signal the initiation of the deployment phase of 511 development – To "launch" 511
- Enabling transportation and telecommunications industry interaction to further mutual understand of each other's industries, objectives, motivations and issues.

Format:

The specific format of the Launch Conference will be worked out over the next few months. It is anticipated that the conference will be 2-4 days in length once the program is firmed up. The types of activities under consideration include:

- *Training sessions* – Synthesizing the vast collective knowledge the Coalition has gained in the past year into one or more targeted training sessions will enable implementers to benefit from this knowledge.

- *Issue presentation and panel sessions* – Sessions on a wide array of hot topics would be a key component of the conference. Sessions would cover policy, technical, implementation experiences, product-related issues with the goal of sharing information that would not ordinarily be available to implementers or their potential vendors. Peer presentations would be a key element in the sessions.
- *Exhibits/Displays* – Solutions providers would be able to showcase their products, applications, services or business models with the expressed purpose of demonstrating the vast array of options available to implement 511 services.
- *Visioning/Keynote sessions* – Opportunities for leaders in 511 – including Policy Committee members – to provide a more strategic assessment on the direction, promise and issues associated with 511 implementation.
- *Media event(s)* – Targeted events or activities aimed at communicating the vision and progress of 511 to the media with the specific messages to be delivered based upon the national 511 marketing plan.

Target Audiences:

Anyone who has an interest in advancing 511 implementation would be welcomed to the conference. Specific audiences would be targeted in particular

- *State and local governments* – all types of officials involved in 511 implementation, including ITS/operations, telecommunications, policy and planning, financing, legal and executive staff
- *Telecommunications* carriers – all types of wireline, wireless and payphone carriers that will – at minimum – be involved in routing calls, and possibly – particularly in the case of wireless carrier – a much more direct role in 511 service delivery.
- *Vendors/Solutions providers* – private firms that hope to operate and/or provide equipment to support 511 services
- *Federal government staff* – Headquarters and field office staffs of pertinent administrations in U.S. DOT as well. FCC staff would also be welcomed and desired.
- *State regulatory staff* – Public service or utilities commission staff that are involved in 511 service planning and/or facilitating contract negotiations by agencies and carriers.
- *Associations* – Staff and leadership in organizations representing the above stakeholders or others that have an interest in 511
- *Academia* – Researchers that are currently looking into – or could look into – issues associated with 511.
- *Consultants* – those that have an interest in support any of the groups above in their efforts to advance 511 implementation.

Next Steps:

The Working Group will take the lead in planning the Launch Conference and will begin its efforts in earnest on August 24. ***The Working Group welcomes any direction or recommendations the Policy Committee may have in terms of making this Launch Conference a success.***

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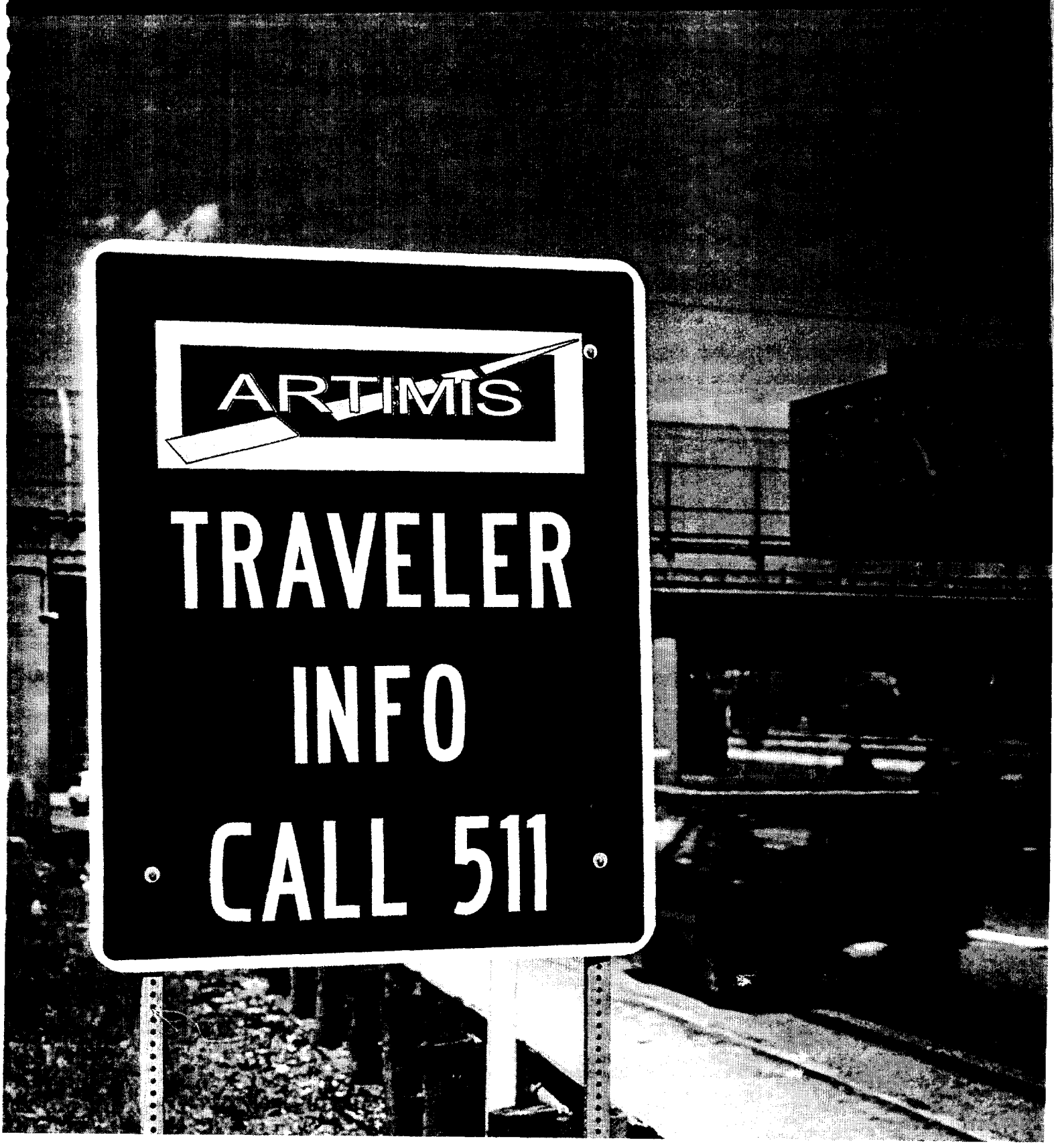
ITE JOURNAL
INSTITUTE OF TRANSPORTATION ENGINEERS
AUGUST
2001



511—America's Traveler Information Number

ON JULY 21, 2000, THE FCC ASSIGNED 511 AS THE NATIONWIDE TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR ITS TRAVELER INFORMATION. IN THIS FEATURE, THE AUTHORS DISCUSS THE ROLE OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN IMPLEMENTING 511 AS WELL AS THE ROLE OF THE 511 DEPLOYMENT COALITION.

BY CHRISTINE M. JOHNSON AND ELWYN TINKLENBERG

IN THE RUSH OF EVERYDAY LIFE, time is increasingly becoming a precious commodity. Everyone needs time to spend with families; time to relax; and time to mow the lawn. There is just not enough of it. Yet with the increased mobility of individuals, more and more time is spent traveling to and from work, the kids' soccer games and the beach. The result of this increased mobility of society is the amount of travel has grown at almost the same rate as the booming economy—at about 4 percent per year over the past 20 years. Yet the growth in roadway capacity has almost been constant at about 0.3 percent per year, or about one-tenth the increase in demand. The result is significantly increased congestion and more uncertainty in how much time daily trips will require.

Many state and local transportation agencies and private-sector companies have been investing heavily in technology to measure what is happening on the roads and communicating this to the traveling public. Virtually every radio station has traffic reports; television stations show live video of roads and their congestion. Many transportation agencies and traffic information providers have Web sites showing the status of their roads. So too has the old standby, the telephone, been used to communicate to the traveling public. The telephone remains the dominant ubiquitous communications media across the United States, reaching virtually every citizen. As the need for and the availability of information on the road system increases in both quantity and quality, having easy access to the information becomes increasingly important. In addition to service provided by some telecommunications companies, most states, many local transportation agencies and virtually all public transit agencies have telephone numbers that will provide some level of traveler information. In fact there are over 300 of these numbers across the country. These systems provide a wide array of information on the status of congestion in metropolitan areas, road closures due to construction and/or maintenance activities, road and weather conditions, transit schedules, route planning, parking and a variety of other information.

The availability of this information can improve the quality of life for citizens every day. Reducing travel time by choosing a different route, time, or mode of travel or knowing how long the trip is going to take so citizens can plan accordingly reduces stress, allowing individuals to regain control over their increasingly busy lives.

While recent deployments of new technology in many regions of the United States have led to improvements in the provision of this information, a lack of consistency remains in terms of the quality and level of content available on these existing traveler information services. Additionally, the sheer "number of numbers" contributes to people's confusion about whom or where to call for the accurate and timely traveler information they want. The obvious solution to this plethora of numbers is to have a single, nationwide, easy-to-remember three-digit number that will provide the local travel conditions in every city and state in the country.

In recognition of those factors, the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in March 1999 for national assignment of an N11 number to be used for traveler information services. That petition was supported by 17 state departments of transportation, 32 transit operators and 23 metropolitan planning organizations and local transportation

agencies. On July 21, 2000, the FCC also recognized this need and assigned 511 as the nationwide telephone number for intelligent transportation systems (ITS) traveler information. In 2005, the FCC will review 511 implementation progress.

THE FCC ORDER

Because N11 numbers are a scarce resource (there are only eight—211 through 911), the FCC put forth certain expectations—in the form of guidance—for the implementation of 511. Among the terms and conditions found in that guidance:

- 511 will be assigned only to government entities, which, at their discretion, can be assigned to private services;
- Technical details of implementation and cost recovery are left with federal, state and local transportation agencies to determine in cooperation with telecommunications carriers; and
- State and local transportation agencies will determine the type of information to be provided.

While the FCC's order defines the basis upon which 511 will be implemented, it does not define the specific details of that implementation. However, it does offer several encouragements:

- Federal, state and local transportation agencies should ensure that 511 transcends municipal boundaries and that its implementation is appropriate to the *national* designation of the number;
- Transportation agencies should determine uniform standards for the information provided to the public; and
- The U.S. DOT should facilitate ubiquitous deployment of 511.

Given that framework, it is easy to get excited about the potential for national implementation of 511 as a standard, easy-to-remember three-digit dialing code for traveler information services, particularly since it represents such an opportunity to advance the current state of the traveler information service practice.

THE ROLE OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The FCC order deliberately allows broad discretion on the part of state and local transportation agencies in the implementation of 511. It also makes it clear that the 511 number belongs to public agencies, not the private sector. Thus, a private provider of traveler information cannot obtain use of the 511 number except through a public agency. However, state and local governments can use the private sector to provide the service to the public.

Therein lies one of the many challenges to state and local transportation agencies. There is only one 511 number, and before any implementation can actually begin, state and local agencies must cooperate to determine how the call will be answered, which will be routed by the landline telecommunications companies based upon where the caller is located. For example, if the landline caller is in a metropolitan area, the call might be routed to the metropolitan transportation management center (TMC) or to a private company using the TMC's data. The information provided might be the status of congestion, travel times and public transit information. Whereas, in a rural area, the state TMC or an authorized private company might receive the call and provide road closure information and road weather information. This implies that before any agency applies for the 511 number, the transportation agencies must decide how the call will be routed based on geographic considerations. Further, if the call will be routed to a private provider, decisions must be made on the minimum level of information quality acceptable to the public sector.

It is for these reasons, and at the urging of the FCC order, that the ITS Joint Program Office established a grant program of $100,000 per state to facilitate the planning that is required to implement 511.[1]

511 DEPLOYMENT COALITION

To assist in the deployment of 511, the U.S. DOT facilitated the establishment of the 511 Deployment Coalition, which is a task force comprised of over 30 state and local transportation agencies and private-sector companies involved in traveler information. The coalition is led by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and has been organized by AASHTO, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), ITS America and the U.S. DOT. The coalition has two operating entities: the 511 Deployment Coalition Policy Committee comprised of executives of its members and the 511 Deployment Coalition Working Group made up of staff members of the coalition. The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) is a member of the policy-level committee.

The coalition has been meeting since December 2000 to address the key issues raised by the FCC and to provide guidance to state and local implementers of 511. The working group prepares alternatives and recommendations on each of the issues for the policy committee's consideration. The policy committee provides direction to the working group on the next steps to be undertaken by the working group. The decisions of the policy committee are expected to be promulgated as *guidelines* in the later part of 2001. The organizations leading the coalition, AASHTO, APTA and ITS America, then plan to seek the support of their memberships in adopting the guidelines.

Specifically, the coalition is addressing several of the issues raised by the FCC order. Those are:

- Should there be a minimum level of content and quality to traveler information provided by 511? It was recognized that 511 is a unique asset and, therefore, should have significance to the traveling public. This means that the public has a right to expect that there is a certain quality and minimum level of content associated with 511.
- To what degree should there be national uniformity or consistency in the information provided by 511? The policy committee agreed that there should be a degree of consistency across the country for 511 service. Yet, there must be adequate leeway for local conditions to dictate the service. The committee felt that there should be a certain "look and feel" to 511 that the public would come to expect.
- Should there be consistency in the cost to the public of obtaining 511 information? There was agreement that the 511 call should be "free" to the public—at least initially. That

is, the call should cost the public no more than a local call for the wireline calls and would use airtime minutes under the caller's plan with the cellular provider. There should be no additional charge for the basic 511 service. It is recognized that certain carriers may offer "premium" services as part of the 511 call that a customer could choose to purchase.

The policy committee recognizes that technology is changing rapidly and the vision for 511 needs to evolve along with technology. Accordingly, it has encouraged the working group to consider both a current "launch" model and a "vision" model of 511. This approach is aimed at achieving rapid introduction of services while facilitating evolution to services that over time increase the breadth, depth and quality of service in the most cost-effective manner possible.

Further, two clear underlying philosophical principles have emerged:

- Embrace private-sector involvement while ensuring basic service availability; and
- Creative solutions are needed, welcomed and encouraged.

The policy committee also agreed that the 511 service will be a one-way communication providing information to the public, not a number to call and report incidents or other travel-related reports. In general, this means that a person will not answer 511; but rather it would be recorded data that is frequently updated and route specific. However, when a caller seeks transit information, the call may be switched to a transit telephone service that does provide customer information via a staffed call center.

GUIDELINES—WHAT IS BEING CONSIDERED?

The policy committee agreed on the need to establish minimum service guidelines aimed at enabling both the public and private sectors to provide traveler information services and options that consumers want and that are tailored to meet specific local needs. It also agreed that these information services would need to grow and evolve along with the advent of new wireless/telecommunications technologies.

It was concluded that the guidelines will articulate a clear vision of what 511 services will be, which is essential if 511 is to resonate as a "brand" to the general public. The 511 vision will establish a clear differentiation between 511 and other N11 services, such as 311, 411 and 911. Further, the notion of "doing only a few things, but doing them very well" has been a recurring theme of the policy committee's deliberations.

THE CONTENT AND QUALITY OF 511 SERVICES

The working group is continuing its efforts to draft content guidelines for the policy committee's review. Those guidelines should:

- Identify baseline content that should be provided. It is agreed that traffic, transit, construction and road weather conditions should be the point of departure for deliberations;
- Include quality levels where possible;
- Acknowledge acceptance of "peripheral" content offerings, such as additional local-option public-sector content and premium, value-added private-sector services. Examples include tourism information and parking information;
- Examine and address as appropriate the possible need to have "tiered" guidelines based on geography (i.e., urban and rural);
- Be based upon current experience in both highway and transit services; and
- Balance the desire to maximize service offerings with the underlying baseline cost to provide each service (if the baseline content is too broad, service provision could be cost prohibitive).

THE NEED FOR NATIONAL CONSISTENCY

The policy committee adopted a philosophy in the near-term: *to provide flexibility to implementers at this early stage while ensuring that callers will recognize the services as part of a national system.* In the longer-term, the policy committee desires a consistent national service and image, though it was recognized that it would take time for early implementations to evolve to being completely consistent. There was consensus on the need for the "look and feel" of basic 511 services to be the same no matter where a customer accesses the service. However, local-option public-sector-oriented and value-added private-sector-oriented services may vary in appearance, allowing for competitive business strategies in the marketplace.

The policy committee directed the working group to draft consistency guidelines for policy committee review. An example topic being considered is system navigation/user interface, which includes several elements:

- **Menu trees:** Should every system have a menu tree? Should there be a standard top-level menu tree? Should the menu-tree structure beyond a top level be consistent (e.g., should systems have a common navigation menu for transit-related information)?
- **Voice commands:** Should consistent terms for content categories be established? Should those terms be used as voice-enabled commands? Should all systems offer voice-enabled commands?
- **Shortcuts:** Should a consistent format for shortcuts be established? Should shortcuts be part of all systems? Should shortcuts be available in voice commands in addition to numerical entry?
- **Initial greeting:** Should there be a reference to a national service or national sponsor in the greeting? Should there be a statement forwarding people to 911? Should there be limits on the greeting, such as time and content?
- **Hours of system operation:** Many, but not all, automated systems are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. However, information may only be updated during a more limited set of hours. Many transit information centers operate extended business day hours. Should there be consistency associated with hours of operation?
- **Timestamp information:** Some automated systems in operation today will indicate in the recorded message when the information was created, enabling the caller to determine how old the report is. Some systems provide a timestamp for all information available based

upon when the last update of any item occurred. Other systems timestamp each specific recorded message (e.g., a particular route). Still many other systems do not use timestamping at all. Should there be any consistency related to timestamping information?

- **Consistency of content above the baseline services:** If content guidelines offer implementers the option of adding additional services, should there be consistency among similar content in different 511 services (e.g., tourism information)?
- **Linkage to 911:** Should each 511 system have a direct connection to the appropriate 911 center(s) in the region? If desired, does this create impossible or complex technical and regulatory problems for 511 implementers? Or is it sufficient to have a message in the initial greeting to the effect, "if this is an emergency, please hang up and dial 911"? Is consistency required at all, or should the issue be left to individual implementers to decide?

THE PRIVATE-SECTOR ROLE

While the FCC assigned the 511 number to government entities, it is recognized that in many instances the actual provider of 511 directly to the public will be the private sector. In most metropolitan areas that have traveler information systems, one or more private-sector contractors and telecommunications companies provide the service. Thus, two types of private-sector companies have a major role in the delivery of 511 service: the companies that provide traveler information content and the telecommunications landline and wireless carriers. Both of these private-sector communities are represented on the 511 Deployment Coalition.

The "content" providers generally aggregate data from a variety of sources, both public and private, and package traveler information for use by other companies that interface with the public, such as radio stations or wireless carriers. These same companies, and others, are often the contractors hired by transportation agencies to provide traveler information via telephone services, Web sites and other means. These companies are used to dealing with the transportation industry and have been involved with traveler information for many years.

The telecommunications carriers are a different industry altogether. The landline, or wireline, companies are the local telephone companies. While there is now competition in the telephone business, these companies are regulated by the FCC and state public utility commissions. Whereas, the wireless carriers are virtually unregulated and have always been a very competitive industry. Neither of these industries has a history of working with the transportation community and, thus, presents a new challenge to transportation officials.

A common concern voiced by both carriers is how to decide to whom they should listen if multiple transportation agencies request special routing for 511 services. It is an understandable concern since so many political jurisdictions are within any one company's coverage area. It is inappropriate to expect these companies to be responsive if the transportation agencies cannot provide a cohesive approach to 511. That is why it is crucial for transportation agencies to speak in a single voice to the telecommunications industry. Further, because the telecommunications companies coverage areas do not match political jurisdictions geographically, it is essential that the two industries work together to implement 511. The primary purpose for the U.S. DOT 511 Deployment Planning Grant program is to provide the planning and coordination necessary to create a cohesive approach for the deployment of 511.

The wireless industry offers several unique challenges. The only significant opposition to the FCC's assignment of 511 was that of the cellular industry. The routing of calls from a mobile user is different than that faced by the landline companies. However, probably more important is their concern that the transportation communities' ownership of 511 will be a competitive hindrance. Most wireless carriers currently provide some form of traveler information service to their customers as part of a package of services they use as discriminators in the competitive marketplace. Thus, they are concerned that government control over traveler information will restrict their ability to compete. In virtually all instances where the wireless carrier provides traveler information, it encompasses a much broader array of service than a transportation agency would be interested in. Services such as restaurant locations and reservations, hotels and entertainment opportunities are typical of these traveler services. Traffic conditions are but a small piece of the pie when wireless carriers speak of traveler information.

Transportation agencies must be sensitive to these issues and work with wireless carriers to ensure that 511 does not become an inhibitor in the competitive marketplace, and yet 511 retains a significance to the traveling public in terms of the traffic and transit information provided.

WHAT EXPERIENCE DO WE HAVE?

Currently, only one 511 has been implemented: the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati metropolitan area, spearheaded by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. On June 11, 2001, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Deputy Executive Director Vincent F. Schimmoller joined Kentucky Governor Paul E. Patton in placing the nation's historic first telephone call to 511 on that system.

In remarks made that day, Schimmoller commended the citizens of the Cincinnati and northern Kentucky metropolitan area for their vision and national leadership in connecting to 511. "While easy access to current local traveler information does not resolve congestion, it does return control to travelers who will be able to make informed choices about time, mode and route of travel. Ultimately 511 will lead to saved lives, time and money and improve the quality of life for America's travelers," he said.

The following are in the process of deploying their 511 service: the San Francisco Bay area Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Minnesota DOT, the Arizona DOT and the Utah DOT. Although other state and metropolitan areas are beginning 511 programs, the U.S.

News
U.S. Department of Transportation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, June 11, 2001
Contact: Susan Slye
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FHWA 23-01

Federal Highway Chief Schimmoller Places Landmark First Call to "511" in Kentucky

Federal Highway Administration Deputy Executive Director Vincent F. Schimmoller today joined Kentucky Gov. Paul E. Patton in placing the nation's historic first telephone call to 511 – America's traveler information telephone number.

Schimmoller commended the citizens of the Cincinnati and northern Kentucky metropolitan area for their vision and national leadership in connecting to 511. "While easy access to current local traveler information does not resolve congestion, it does return control to travelers who will be able to make informed choices about time, mode and route of travel. Ultimately 511 will lead to saved lives, time and money and improve the quality of life for America's travelers," he said.

The northern Kentucky-Cincinnati metropolitan area is the first region in the country to adopt the national dialing code. Several more jurisdictions are expected to implement 511 later this year. To facilitate national implementation of 511, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is working with a coalition that includes the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, the Intelligent Transportation Society of America, and the American Public Transportation Association.

The concept of a national traveler information telephone number developed from a growing awareness that even greater benefit could be derived from the nation's multimillion-dollar investments in Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) by delivering local traveler information directly to the public by telephone. In 1999 DOT petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a three-digit telephone number, and on July 21, 2000, the FCC assigned 511 for local traveler information.

At the time the department submitted its petition, more than 300 traveler information telephone numbers existed nationwide. As area codes proliferated and American travel continued to increase, it became clear that a single three-digit national number would be useful in providing motorists with local traveler information – anytime and anywhere.

Five-one-one implementation is eligible for regular federal-aid highway funding. In addition, the department has established a grant program to assist transportation agencies in planning and converting to 511. Additional information on 511 and the 511-implementation assistance grant program is on the Internet at http://www.its.dot.gov/.